

Winter Use Plan and EIS

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway



Scoping Newsletter – June 2005

The National Park Service is beginning to prepare a long-term plan for managing winter recreational use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway. We are beginning the public scoping phase of this planning process, and the purpose of this letter is to invite your participation.

Public scoping is an opportunity for the public to comment on the issues and alternatives that should be addressed in the planning process. This allows you to tell the NPS what you would like to see considered in the plan – before it is actually prepared.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Winter Use Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be to ensure that park visitors have a range of appropriate winter recreational opportunities, while ensuring that these recreational activities are in an appropriate setting and do not impair or irreparably harm park resources or values. The EIS will consider a variety of different alternatives for managing winter use in the parks.

ALTERNATIVES

The NPS will include alternatives with various limits on the number of snowmobiles that may enter the parks. We

will also consider alternatives with varying guiding requirements, including allowing for some unguided or non-commercially snowmobile guided use. We will also consider an alternative allowing only mass-transit snowcoaches. Scoping may inform us of the need to consider additional alternatives.

The Winter Use Plan will also evaluate the impacts of road grooming on bison and other ungulates, and whether or not groomed oversnow roads facilitate bison movement to locations outside Yellowstone National Park. To assess this issue, the EIS will include alternatives with varying road segments left ungroomed for experimental purposes (and/or other experimental designs to determine the effects of oversnow roads on bison and other ungulates). An independent assessment of the effects of road grooming on bison, by Dr. Cormack Gates of the University of Calgary, was recently released (online at: www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm). This report, and other scientific reports, will be used in the winter use plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The EIS will evaluate the environmental effects of winter use on air quality and visibility, wildlife, natural soundscapes, employee and visitor health and safety, visitor experience, and socioeconomics.

What happened last winter? What's happening next winter?

Currently, winter use in the parks is operating under a temporary winter use plan. The temporary plan is in place after two previous NPS decisions about winter

use were returned to the NPS for further work by federal courts. The temporary plan is intended to be in effect for three winter seasons (the winters of 2004-2005, 2005-

2006, and 2006-2007), while the NPS prepares a long-term winter plan. The temporary winter use plan allows for a maximum of 720 commercially guided snowmobiles in Yellowstone each day. In Grand Teton, 50 snowmobiles are allowed per day on both the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail and on the Grassy Lake Road and 40 snowmobiles are allowed per day on Jackson Lake in order to provide access for ice fishing. With few exceptions, all snowmobiles are required to be “Best Available Technology,” which are the cleanest and quietest commercially available snowmobiles. Snowcoaches are also permitted in Yellowstone and the Rockefeller Parkway, and are required to have functioning emissions control equipment. Snowplanes are not allowed on

Jackson Lake or elsewhere in the three parks.

Last winter, nearly 85,000 people visited Yellowstone National Park. Of these, 24,000 entered on snowmobiles and 17,000 on snowcoaches through the park’s oversnow entrances, while 43,000 drove into the park in their automobiles through the North Entrance. An average of approximately 240 snowmobiles entered Yellowstone each day. The NPS believes that the reduced snowmobile use from historic levels was partly a result of the public’s uncertainty about whether or not the parks were open or how to visit them and from a lack of snowfall.

Next winter, the parks will be open to snowmobiles and snowcoaches and will be operating under the temporary plan.

What is the timeline for the winter use plan?

The temporary winter use plan allows for snowmobile and snowcoach use through the winter of 2006-2007. Therefore, this planning process will result in a decision that will be implemented beginning with the winter of 2007-2008. Since some winter use decisions may require changes in the parks’ regulations, the NPS will also integrate the rulemaking process with the EIS. A proposed rule would be published shortly after the release of the draft EIS, and a final rule would be published after the record of decision is signed.

Public scoping	June 24- September 1, 2005
Draft EIS released with 60- day public comment	Spring 2006
Proposed regulation with 60- day public comment	Spring 2006
Final EIS	Spring 2007
Record of decision	Summer 2007
Final regulation	Summer 2007
Decision implemented	December 2007

Expected role of the public in NPS decision making

The purpose of public engagement is to get input on how NPS will manage winter recreation in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the Rockefeller Parkway, within the legal, political, and resource constraints we have. Our promise is to keep you informed, actively listen, and acknowledge public concerns. We’ll also let you know how public input influenced our decisions. We recognize that many people

have participated in winter use planning through the years. We admire and appreciate your continued interest in this issue, and we hope that you will continue to be actively involved through this process.

The NPS will be inviting several other government agencies to participate in the development of the EIS as cooperating agencies, including the states of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho; the counties of Park

and Teton, Wyoming, Gallatin and Park, Montana, and Fremont, Idaho; the Environmental Protection Agency; and the U.S. Forest Service. Cooperating agency status allows these government entities to share information that will be useful to the

NPS as the EIS is prepared. However, the NPS is ultimately responsible for the development and content of the EIS, and the NPS will be the decision-maker about winter use in the parks.

The NPS will use the public comments received during scoping to begin preparing the draft EIS. Specifically, we are seeking your thoughts on:

- The issues and potential environmental impacts the winter use plan should address.
- The alternatives the winter use plan should consider.

There will be two other opportunities to submit comments:

- Once the EIS is released in the spring of 2006, there will be another 60-day public comment period.
- You will also be able to comment on the proposed regulations to implement the winter use decision in the spring of 2006.

To submit comments on the scope of the EIS:

You are strongly encouraged to submit your comments through the Internet at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. Simply select "Yellowstone National Park" from the drop down box and then follow the link for the winter use plan.

You may also submit comments by mailing them to:

Winter Use Scoping
Yellowstone National Park
P.O. Box 168
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

Finally, comments may be hand-delivered to Yellowstone National Park headquarters in Mammoth Hot Springs. Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or any other way than those specified above.

Comments must be received by September 1, 2005.

Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

For more information, please visit:

www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm

You may also contact Yellowstone National Park at: 307-344-2019.